HERMENEUTICS OF THE LEFT-HAND PATH: VIEWING MODERN OCCULTISM AS A CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY

BY

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INTRODUCING THE OCCULT

In current popular terminology, the term Occult maintains sinister overtones, at once signifying something dark and unknown, and something dangerous that threatens the integrity of the mind. The terms relations in the popular mind with Satanism, Dennis Wheatley and a heavy-metal oeuvre, serve to heighten the reputation for the occult as having something to do with breaking inherent social norms and values. But the term, particularly in academic usage, is vague and nebulous - like the terms 'religion', 'spirituality' and 'mystical', they mean different things to different people. What we can say about the word 'occult', is not necessarily the same as what we can say about the world-views and practices which can be loosely defined as 'occult'. The word itself means 'hidden', and scholarly discussion of the occult takes the researcher into the territory of the Western Esoteric Tradition, sometimes called the Western Mystery Tradition or simply the Western Mysteries, a body of knowledge and practices reputed to be an historical undercurrent to exoteric forms of religiosity like Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Pearson gives a definition of this as "a vast field encompassing a body of material gathered together in the West since the end of the 15th Century, including the kabbalah, hermeticism, gnosticism and the occult sciences of astrology, alchemy and magic. It pertains to the connections between man and the universe (microcosm and macrocosm)." [1] Esoteric as a word implies something requiring a special knowledge for complete understanding. It should be noted here that the term Western Esoteric Tradition, and its sister terms the Western Mysteries and the Western Mystery Traditions, are all terms which were used by insiders to describe their particular beliefs and practices. This particular issue, of

1 Pearson, "The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism", pg. 50.

Insider discourse infiltrating academic discourse will be dealt with at length within this essay, as it may be one of the particular problems within current scholarly discourse upon occultism. Though an insider himself, the present author will do his best to tackle these issues, through just application of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion to his own set of practices and belief. These will be presented in proceeding sections. While perhaps implicitly asking the question “Can Occultism be studied as a religion or spirituality?”, the following paper will consciously be working towards answers to another question: “If we do study occultism as a spirituality or an object of religiosity [2], what kind of picture do we get?”

Occultism, and its practice, could be defined as acknowledgement of hidden relationships between phenomena: more specifically acknowledgement of power relationships between seen and unseen forces, and a belief, if not an experiential subjective knowledge, of a sympathy between the two. It is perhaps in this context that the word occult really comes into use within history. The most prominent account of its first usage was by Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) in his *De occulta philosophia*, the first version of which was written in 1509-1510[3]. Jocelyn Godwin in his book *The Theosophical Enlightenment* gives the following notes on his own usage of these terms, which will help in our own enquiry: “The *occult sciences* in the West include astrology, alchemy, ritual magic, practical Kabbalah, certain breathing and sexual practices, and various forms of divination.”[Italics in original][4] In the following enquiry, Godwin’s own vague references to “certain breathing and sexual practices” will be dealt with at length, as will the study and practice of Ritual Magic(k). Regarding the specific word ‘occultism’ Godwin makes the following historic observations: “*Occultism* as a concept dates only from the mid-nineteenth

2 This term, though unwieldy, is preferred in the context of the current study over the term ‘religion’, due to its ‘looser’ boundaries concordant with the nebulous form of some contemporary spiritualities, and allows us to view things which may seem ‘religious‘ but aren‘t necessarily definable as a ‘religion’.

3 Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, pg. 45.

4 Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, pg. xii.

century, as the term for the pursuit of occult science in deliberate opposition to the prevailing beliefs of scientific materialism. Thus, although Sir Isaac Newton was an alchemist, and Johannes Kepler was an astrologer, they were not occultists. " [Italics in original] [5] As Godwin has demonstrated through his examples, we must be cautious about who we term an occultist, and by extension how we define and determine an occultist in the first place. For instance, is an astrologer an occultist? Is an occultist necessarily an astrologer? The entirety of the foregoing is bound up with these issues.

The word 'Occult', then, refers to a number of things: firstly the universe hidden from view, the unseen forces at work for instance within the practice of Alchemy or Astrology, which are not apparent unless consciously sought after. Secondly, the word occult could refer to practices purposefully hidden from view, either for fear of persecution from rival religious bodies, or because the practices themselves were seen as somehow dangerous. Though it has been demonstrated that the popular Neo-Pagan discourse of the "burning times" is inconcordant with recorded history, and that blasphemy, heresy and scepticism were commonplace and unpunished in the 16th and 17th centuries [6] - raising demons was probably not seen as sympathetic with the Christian Faith. 'The Witches Hammer', the *Maleus Malificarum* of James I, though unlikely to be a direct reflection of the attitude of the whole papacy, certainly serves as an illustration of the dangers, at one specific point in history, of 'public' occultism and the belief and practice of magic (a discussion and definition of which is approaching). Indeed, the practice of witchcraft and magic was still illegal up until 1951. Joanne Pearson gives the following upon this event in her essay *The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism*: "This replaced witchcraft acts in England and Scotland when they were repealed in 1736. It both

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5 *Ibid.*
6 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pg. 170-171

allowed a person to be prosecuted if he or she was alleged to have magical powers *and* denied the possibility of such powers‘ existence. It was replaced in1951 by the Fraudulent Mediums Act, which gave freedom for individuals to practice witchcraft so long as no harm was done to person and property.” [7] The preceding references to legal, papal and perhaps cultural attitudes have been specific to Western culture from the Renaissance to the modern era, but the trial of the Templars in 1314 also reveals a distinct antipathy towards any practices that purported, or even vaguely suggested, links and dealings with diabolical forces and personalities. What the Templars were really doing is not the point here, just that some of the greatest charges that could be rallied against a person often involved charges of practices antithetical to Christianity. In the modern era, great antipathy can still be found within evangelical Christianity towards the concept of witchcraft and the occult. But, as will be discussed, Occultism is no longer as hidden from view as it once may have been.

As an object of religiosity, Occultism is perhaps best defined as a personal teleological matrix of theory and practice. It is not a 'religion' in the sense of an organised body of tradition, but it is a religion in the sense of a world-view with corresponding codes, signs and symbols that are recognisable as being a specific product of that world-view. In a similar sense, if Spirituality is defined as an individual's sense of a relationship with the sacred or divine, Occultism is also a spirituality. These characteristics it shares with discussion of New Age spiritualities. Indeed, there is a wealth of cross-pollination between the one and the other, in the same sense that there is with Paganism, but particularly Neo-Paganism - a body of theory and practice which attempts to revive and repopulate modern culture with myth-cycles and ideologies contrary and distinct from culturally dominant forms of religiosity.

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7 Pearson, “The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism”, pg. 50.

Because of this cross-pollination between New Age, Neo-Paganism and the Occult, the former two religious phenomena have arguably been studied to the exclusion of the latter. While the Occult is implicit in academic discussions of New Age and Paganism, an exact definition of what the Occult is, is often neglected and assumed self-evident. But the invention of the term the Western Esoteric Tradition has served the purposes of clarifying to some academics what might be meant when the word Occultism is used, and the word Occultism itself left largely to the sphere of public terminology. Hermeticism has also been given space as a useful term within academic practice, referring to the particular theories and philosophy expounded in the Corpus Hermeticum, or the practices laid out in texts whose authorship is often attributed to the semi-mythological figure of Hermes Trismegistus [8]. These are, particularly, Alchemy, Magic and Astrology. What is now perhaps coming clear is that 'The Occult', as a term used by insiders to refer to a specific sphere of spiritual theory and practice, denotes a vast spectrum of codes and signals: The Tarot, Alchemy and Kabbalah are concepts belonging to the esoteric and occult in some sense because their meaning depends on an informed understanding. However, the Tarot, Alchemy, and the Kabbalah are articles which no longer remain purely esoteric, as they have increasingly in recent years become public, popular codes of meaning for what was once a private and obscure set of alternative cultural discourses. tarot cards were laid bare for public audience in the James Bond film 'Live and Let Die'; Alchemy was the subject of the recent best-selling book by Peter Coelho, titled aptly enough, *The Alchemist*. Also Kabbalah has had its brush with popular culture as one of many 'celebrity fads' the mass-media has centred in upon. However, except perhaps in the case of Coelho, 'Tarot' and 'Kabbalh' remain two-dimensional codes, with no particular public discourse existence upon the content behind the codes. Madonna's attempts at writing a children's book delineating the nature of the Sephiroth on the

8 For a discussion of the mythological figure of Hermes Trismegistus see Yates, *Giordano Bruno and The Hermetic Tradition,* pps. 44-49; and also Adrian G. Gilbert's foreward in Walter Scott' s translation of the Corpus Hermticum, *Hermetica,* particularly pps.10-18.

Otz Chim cannot be commented upon, as the present author hasn't read it [9]. But despite the perhaps arbitrary existence of these articles as public knowledge, it is in this sense that the very idea of an Esoteric and Occult tradition becomes obsolete, because, though the meaning of certain terms and phrases may remain obscure without sufficient enquiry, 'occulture' [10], the occult community and its manifestations in art, media and communications, has arrived at a state of public scrutiny, with its particular materials bare for anyone to scrutinise in Waterstone's and Borders but particularly within cyber-space, where many 'occult secrets' are in plane view, therefore obscuring the once clear boundaries between the 'initiated' and the 'profane', to borrow antiquated words from the Occult tradition itself.

What remains esoteric about the Western Esoteric Tradition is the experience of the insider. A methodologically sound approach to reviewing Occultism could involve phenomenology and an ethnographic profile of a specific event, which methods I will use in the foregoing. But use of phenomenology and the eidetic vision evokes the problems presented by etic and emic perspectives, arguably more of an acute problem within the study of the Western Esoteric Tradition and Occultism than within other traditions. While the limits of phenomenology are always imposed through the existential handicap of perceptive barriers between one human mind and another, regardless of the cultural practices being studied, phenomenology as applied to occultism suffers from this handicap to a greater degree, due to the purported effects of practical occultism upon the consciousness of the practitioner. Because practical occultism reputedly changes the mind, represented allegorically as the alchemical transmutation of Lead into Gold, when the phenomenologist views this transmuted

9 The *Otz Chim* is the central glyph of Hermetic Kabbalh, 'the Tree of Life' - the *sephiroth* are successive stages of manifestation in the Neo-Platonic philosophy of that particular system. A note will be made here of the importance in differentiating the Kabbalah of Judaism, with the Renaissance Christian-Kabbalah which the Hermetic Kabbalah is lragely a development of. See Yates's introduction to her, *The Occult Philosophy in The Elizabethan Age* for a thorough discussion of the distinction.
10 A term the present author will use to indicate modern occult communities and practices, whose heritage is the wider band of the Occult Tradition.

Gold they will still see it as Lead, unless they have partaken of the process whereby the 'substance' is transmuted. Pretending they see Gold when they really see Lead will do no good either, making the task of phenomenologicaly perceiving the occult world-view as a potential difficulty without empirical knowledge. However, this is not necessarily a problem exclusive to the Western Esoteric Tradition and occult spirituality. What is peculiar about the Western Esoteric Tradition, as with a tradition like Tibetan Buddhism, is the idea of initiation and the purported changes it brings to the perception of the Insider towards certain codes and symbols within a tradition. To what extent can the scholar of religions actually 'see' these changes, without merely accepting the practitioners experience that they are there? But is it at all fruitful to question the legitimacy of the experience of an initiate? In a methodological note to his own study of Neo-Paganism, *Listening People, Speaking Earth,* Graham Harvey makes the following point: "My approach in Religious Studies is Phenomenological. That means that I take seriously people's self-understanding and self-presentation. While I am not necessarily convinced or enthralled by everything that Pagan's do and say, I consider what they do and say as what Paganism is." This is an implicit assumption in the study of older, well established and public traditions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It is perhaps easier to discern a person as practising this or that religion if an established orthodoxy exists as a template for the religious scholar to refer to. With occultism, as with Neo-paganism, though a traceable tradition of practice exists for the scholar to consider, a reigning orthodoxy is lacking, as is a hierarchy disseminating ontological specifics about the religion, except in the case of specific groups and communities. This perhaps makes it necessary for such statements to be made. It is for this reason that the present author feels the need to regard the individual experience of Initiation as paramount in discerning the wider narratives of the occult tradition and occulture. The variability from one practitioner to another, particularly in the Left-Hand Path teleology discussed here, necessitate a different approach than spiritualities and religions with an established orthodoxy. As

will be shown, an 'orthodoxy' may be apparent in the religiosity of an occult practitioner, but is often conjoined with other 'orthodoxies', pluralising and therefore perhaps nullifying the concept in the ongoing creation of the personal teleological matrix.

There are perhaps superficial links between initiation and baptism in, for example, certain Christian traditions. But because of the teleological nature of Western Esoteric practice, often seen as a linear progression from a to b[11], this entails the necessity of a 'beginning' for the practitioner, a symbolic event of emergence into the teleological process, but also successive continuing initiations during the teleological process - this is what initiation is meant to represent. Nema (Maggie Ingals), High Priestess of Maatian Magick, gives the following succinct definition of initiation from a practitioners perspective: "Initiation is the process in which one discovers a new view of everything, a larger context for understanding and wisdom." [12] This definition is emblematic of the continuing nature of Initiation in modern occultism. Graham Harvey presents a neat discussion of initiation in the context of Witchcraft, highlighting the different attitudes from practitioner to practitioner:

> Some witches are happy to perform their own initiations, guided by books, other people's ideas and their own intuition. Others insist that initiation must take place in prescribed ways. Only properly initiated priestesses and priests can properly initiate others. This can simply mean that to be a priestess or priest means to be recognised by someone; it is not a question of your opinion of yourself. More often it is understood that individuals can dedicate themselves to a path, but initiation is a greater step, one which involves others

11 For instance, a Rosicrucian teleology, adopted by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, presented as a system of grades: Neophyte, Zelator, Theoricus, Practicus and Philosophus. See King, *Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn*, pg. 34. One cannot be a Philosophus until one has passed the grades before it. In the Horus Maat lodge, however, there are no grades; more specifically, the Order ov Chaos (www.crossraods.wild.net.au/order.htm) has grades, but in no specific order - anyone can obtain a grade at any time, and jump from any one 'grade' to another.
12 Nema, *The Way of Mystery*, pg. 202.

shaping the experience. [13]

Baptism, however, is interpreted as an end in itself, and though perhaps an introduction to a Church, it is not the first process of many which, whether perceived as linear or non-linear, usually involve a prolonged, perhaps even a lifetime, commitment towards something to 'complete'. Towards discussing the importance of initiation and verifying what it involves, an autobiographical ethnographic study will be presented, where the present author was initiated into the Horus-Maat Lodge. A full delineation of everything that was occurring will be given, with a subsequent deconstruction and analysis of the event in question. The present author will therefore be shifting between Insider and Outsider perspectives. A model for this insider as academic approach was provided by Jenny Blain's book *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic.* [14] Though that particular book is concerned with Neo-Paganism and the re-invention of a specifically Nordic tradition, it serves as an illustration of the links between the traditions usually regarded as Occult. Specific linkages can be found between different Neo-pagan traditions and the wider band of the Western Esoteric Tradition through the importance of 'Ritual Magic(k)'[15] to sections of both. A working definition of Ritual Magick for the scholar of religions could be the perceived interaction of the practitioner with internal and/or external forces which produce changes in consciousness and/or the environment. Specific to the following discussion is also the idea of a Left-Hand Path of Occultism, a term which has already been used but not defined. While in certain areas of occult practice sex, drugs, homosexuality and the blurring of gender are prohibited or at least not

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13 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, pg. 45.

14 See Blain, *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic,* pgs. 8-12.

15 The ‘k’ in magic is a either/or insider’s appendage. Harvey explains: “...the ‘k’ is an important part of the self-identity of many magic(k)ians, not only left-hand path ones. In particular it distinguishes them from popular forms of magic as stage or tv entertainment, i.e. tricks. There are some pagans who reject this variety of ritual magic.” *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, pg. 97. The foregoing is largely concerned with communities where the ’k’ is an important appendage, hence its usage here.

encouraged[16] in others they are elevated to a position of importance [17]. The former is the right hand path, and the latter the left. The Left-Hand Path is not a distinction peculiar to the Western occult community, having as its source the Hindu concept of the *Varma Marg* - and from the authors personal experience within Occulture, it's discernible that the distinction is important to some, and less important to others. Practitioner Anton Channing says the following about the distinction: “These terms [right-hand path and left-hand path] are archaic and would seem to have little relevance to any holistic magical system, a system that aimed at the liberation of all aspects of the self, be they light or dark.”[18] It might, however, be useful in a scholarly context in order to isolate the specific attitudes of one section of the occult world-view and its specific community from another, and to clarify specific attendant theories and practices. A more detailed discussion of Left-Hand Path occultism will be presented at the beginning of the next section.

As a continuation of the discussion of ethnography within the Western Esoteric Tradition, to pursue a thorough ethnography of the occult, the existence of the Internet prescribes a distinct advantage for the ethnographer, forcing them admittedly to become a cyber-ethnographer, where the Internet is used as a lens of international focus. The researcher is able to see international communities and view their discussions, and in some cases see the occupations of members and gain insight into their practices and beliefs[19]. The distinct disadvantage of any ethnographic research enacted through the Internet is the veracity of the people encountered - sometimes their gender is unknown (the present author, for instance, on his own Yahoo profile, left the gender section totally blank) and one can only act on faith that they are telling the truth about associations and experiences, and whether they

16 For instance within the Society of the Inner Light (ref)
17 For instance, the Order ov Chaos. See *Silk Milk # 2*, various contributors, edited by Orryelle Defenestrate-Bascule, particularly pps, 22, 33-34, 68-74.
18 Channing, *Kaos Heiroglyphica*, Pg. 19.
19 For instance, see www.witchvox.com. Particularly this place here in this. And alt.magick.com for ongoing communications and conversations between a variety of occultists and occult enthusiasts.

actually practice the occult. But in some cases, this is no different than some real time and space ethnography - it is often taken for granted, if only for convenience, that the ethnographic subject is telling the truth. Cyber-ethnography, is arguably invaluable at arriving at a clear idea of 'who' an occultist is, and creating a socio-geographic picture of occultists on an international scale. No other source enables the scholar to view such a wide berth of occult practitioners all-in-one-place. It could be pertinent here to remember that when we ask the question "who or what is an Occultist?" we run into the same difficulties posed by asking the question "who or what is a Muslim?" - except that in the latter case, as with Christianity and other organised religious traditions, religion can often be entwined with ethnicity as a specific part of an inherited cultural identity, rather than an active daily article of practice and belief. An Occultist is such because they choose to be, bringing us back full circle to the idea that as an applied religiosity, Occultism is perhaps best defined as a personal teleological matrix of theory and praxis, belonging to the wider band of codes, signs and symbols which collectively make up the Western Esoteric Tradition.

THE LEFT-HAND PATH OF OCCULTISM

As with most religious and spiritual traditions, Western Esotericism has its own version of its own history, perhaps not aligned with accepted historical discourse.[20] Though that should, perhaps, read as histories - for not all histories are agreed, and not all practitioners are concerned with a specific, identifiable lineage of the occult tradition. What seems accepted, as gathered from the survival of texts from Ancient to more modern times, is that magical practice and belief, Astrology and the general interface of the human species with other states of consciousness and the sacred are as old as recorded history. Indeed, in James Frazer’s now outdated

20 As also observed within Neo-paganism and their idea of a continuation of a pre-Christian Pagan tradition.

Golden Bough, it is proposed that religion grew out of Magic - something also proposed, by the title alone, in Keith Thomas's study *Religion and the Decline of Magic.* It is also arguable that modern Occultism has much in common with Occultism in the Ancient Greek era. Only a very brief comparison need be made between any modern publication from the magical community and Ancient Greek Papyrus to notice the similarities in syncretistic approach:

> O lord Apollo, come with Paian. Give prophecy concerning those things I desire, lord. O master leave Mount Parnassos and the Delphic Pytho whenever my priestly mouth gives voice to secret words, foremost angel of the god, great Zeus. IAO! I call thee MICHAEL, who holdeth the heaven's realm, I call thee GABRIEL. Come down from Olympos, ABRASAX, who delighteth in the dawn, come with favour, who vieweth the sunset from the dawn: ADONAI. Father of the world, all nature trembles in fear before thee: PAKERBETH![21]

Here we have the names of the Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and a title of the Judeo-Christian God Adonai in the same invocation as Zeus, Appollo, IAO and Abrasax, a fusion of Greek and Gnostic deities. The syncretistic and inclusive approach to spirituality is not an exclusive feature of modern occultism, but of contemporary spiritualities in general. [22] This tradition of magic and occultism, then, appears to be a distinct verifiable history, apart from the claims of Western Esotericism, which maintains a similar discourse, but also relating Ancient Egypt as a source of their traditions, particularly the Hermetic tradition, and sometimes incorporating discourses about ancient sources, such as Atlantis and Lemuria[23].

Specific to this study are Insider discourses about the use of sex within mystical

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21 Flowers, *Hermetic Magic*, pg. 190, from Hans Deiter Betz's *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation.*

22 See Sutcliffe, "Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World" pps. 27,28

23 Theosophy in particular, but at a pagan moot in Belfast, I did hear a Druid talk about a long tradition of Druidry, starting in Atlantis..

practice, and sexual symbolism within the occult. A discussion of these particular aspects of occultism are bound up within the hermeneutics of the Left-Hand Path. It seems generally accepted within Left-Hand Path Occultism that most of the Alchemical literature extant from the middle ages onward are veiled texts, written in so-called twilight language, which are purported to provide instruction in the practice of sacred sex [24]. It is claimed that the particular processes presented delineate methods whereby the occult practitioner, with either a sexual partner or by themselves, can create substances, through practice of the correct methods, which can the be used in Ritual Magcikal contexts[25]. These practices remain integral to most Left-Hand path occultism, but are particularly valued tools within the Thelemic Current.

As will no doubt have been noted, as this paper has progressed, the lens of the researcher has started with broad definitions, and has drawn in deeply to more specific modes of occult practice and belief. Having begun unpacking the term 'Right-Handed' and 'Left-Handed' paths in relation to Occultism, branching off into a thorough discussion of the latter, we have now arrived at distinctions and branches within the sphere of Left-Hand Path occultism itself. These are discussed in Graham Harvey's *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, in a chapter wholly devoted to the subject, so that a discussion of these elements is not entirely new.[26] But what constitutes the Thelemic Current? What is Thelemic? What is a Current? Thelema is a particular manifestation of occult doctrine and practice resulting from the life and work of Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). Before discussing Thelema at more length as an article of Occult practice and belief, which will bring us into the first person account of Initiation and the Magickal Path, discussing the term Current in relation to

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24 See Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, pgs. 248-255 and also Donald Michael Kraig's practical instruction book, *Modern Sex Magick*, pps. 3-5, 9-15 particularly, but he devotes the first chapter to the history of sex magick.
25 Kraig, *Modern Sex Magick*, pg. 327-329.
26 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth,* pgs. 97-101

Occultism and specifically Ritual Magick would be useful. A current is a stream of ideas, philosophies and practices characterised by particular forces and energies, and often specific Deities. Within Left-Hand Path Occultism, there are a number of currents for the practitioner to draw from - the Kaos Current, characterised by the goddess Babalon (Thelemic spelling), the 23 Current, characterised by Deities appearing in the science-fantasy of H.P.Lovecraft - and broader labels such as the Draconian Current and the Typhonian Current[27]. Detailed discussion of these different Currents within modern occultism would bring our subject into even more complicated compartmentalisation, and they are not integral to the practice and belief of all occultists, but their mention hopefully serves as an indication of the complexity of discussing modern Occultism in an academic context: if we view Occultism as a personal matrix of belief and practice, the varieties perhaps number the amount of practitioners themselves, bringing into question whether studying Occultism as an article of religiosity is ultimately fruitful.

In the sphere of Thelemic practices, the use of sex and sexuality is paramount as an element of the personal teleology. The fusion and popularity of Tantric practices, and the subsequent importation of Guru-Chela lineages specific, for instance, in the Nath tradition, are an important aspect of Occulture, due to the frequency of Left Hand occultists to be involved in Tantric practice. This also brings into question the peculiar difficulty of whether to consider some occultists Tantrics, or Tibetan Buddhists, alongside their specific articles of Occult practice and belief. Ultimately though, it serves as a distinct indication of the complexity of contemporary religiosity. We will return to this discussion in an attempt to resolve these issues in conclusion to the whole paper, and continue below with an attempted general outline of Left Hand path Occultism.

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27 The names of all of these currents are derived from, respectively, the following: Biroco (ed.) *Kaos*, Defenestrate-Bascule “The 23 Current” in *SilkMilk # 1*. The Draconian and Typhonian Current’s are expounded upon at great length in Kenneth Grant’s three trilogies of books, which will be listed in the bibliography.

The particular practices which constitute Left-Hand Path occultism are now available, as with most occult theory, to a much wider audience. Amongst the usage of sexual substances to charge magickal talismans, and as specific elixir or sacrament to imbibe for transformational effects, sex is also used to induce trance within the practitioner[28], notably within Chaos Magick, a ritual magick movement that started in Leeds, England, and continues to maintain a strong presence within occulture. Chaos Magick is particularly concerned with the anarchic breaking down old forms of occult practice, encouraging the practitioner to encompass whatever practices work within a personal 'magickal path'. As may have been noted already, however, this is a broad characteristic of Occultism, not necessarily the exclusive practice of Chaos Magicians[29].

Another aspect of Left Hand path occultism of note is the use of mind-altering substances. As has been observed within the psychology of religions[30], drugs have been used to induce religious experience, or as part of religious or magical ritual by different cultures and throughout history. Even in the Catholic Mass, alcohol is distributed to the gathered participants, perhaps not in a dose sufficient to produce intoxication, but alcohol is a drug nonetheless. The particular issues surrounding the use of one drug or another are often dictated by the legality of the substance, and/or reigning cultural discourses regarding their effects, upon both the individual and society at large. To induce *gnosis,* in the specific sense of that term as used by Chaos Magicians as a state of magickal trance[31], is one way in which these substances are used. The other is perhaps in the mystical sense, in order to change

28 Carrol, *Liber Null and Psychonaut,* pp.68-71
29 Harvey gives a fair treatment of what constitutes Chaos Magick in *Listening People, Speaking Earth,* pp.99-100.
30 Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience*, pps. 85-88
31 Carrol, *Liber Null and Psychonaut,* pp. 31-35.

the mind to better appreciate an Ultimate Reality.[32]

As a set of theories and practices, then, often integrated with the use of Ritual Magick, Left-Hand Path Occultism uses sex and sexuality towards specific goals linked in with the teleological process discussed above. We will now break down the specific elements of Left-Hand Path occultism in the west, in order to distinguish and analyse a specific set of theories and practices within the broader occult tradition. The present author will reference the more general parts of the following discussion, and some of it will be his own interpretation as an insider. I will leave it to the reader, (both academic and practitioner) to criticise or find fault with interpretations[33], none of which are particularly profound.

As a form of Left-Hand Path occultism, Thelema is a set of beliefs and practices born from a trajectory set by the Hermeticism of the Renaissance and the Ceremonial Magic of groups like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, combined perhaps with the philosophy of Schopenhaur and Nietzche. The first Thelemic texts, or Holy Books as they are known within the movement, were written down by Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). The central text is The Book of the Law, *Liber Al Vel Legis*[34]*,* which sets forth the Law of Thelema, upon which Thelemic practice is based. Deities initially central to Thelema are Nuit, Hadit, Babalon, Therion, Ra-Hoor-Khuit, Hoor-Paar-Kraat and Heru-Ra-Ha, Aiwass and Pan[35]; but, as one part of the central Law of Thelema is to 'Do what thou Wilt', these deities can be some of many, for example the Voudoun pantheon or Ganesha/Ganapati, which a Thelemite chooses to incorporate into their practices. The central tenet of Thelema is the pursuing of the

32 Partridge, "Sacred Chemicals: Psychedelic Drugs and Mystical Experience" pg. 115
33 Following Graham Harvey's example, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, pp. viii.
34 Because many of Crowley's magickal writings were given latin names, they sometimes maintain those titles.
35 See Duquette, *The Magick of Thelema* pp.79-85. For the origins of Thelemic practice, and the basic philosophy and rituals initially created by Aleister Crowley, this book is very useful, albeit an insider account.

True Will - not the ordinary will determining the execution of various daily desires, but the individual's own particular orbit, which he/or she is theorised within Thelema as not necessarily being conscious of. This is the paramount practice within Thelemic discourse, and seems deeply related with the Alchemical idea of the Great Work. While also often taking from the specific teleology as used by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and in Crowley's organisation based on that order, the Argenteum Astrum. This teleology is roughly the following; it should be noted however that this isn't exclusively Thelemic, nor is Thelemic practice exclusively bound up with the following: Initiation, gaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, and Crossing the Abyss. Initiation we have mentioned, and will further delineate in the next section.

Within magical practice, The Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel is a process whereby the practitioner gains a specific spirit or guide which is said to be aligned to them at birth, but rigid dogma regarding this is non-existent, as with many elements within modern occultism, personal interpretation and analysis is encouraged. Peter Carrol gives the following on the importance of this process to the magickal path: “The magician's most important invocation is that of his Genius, Daemon, True Will, or Augoeides. This operation is traditionally known as attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. It is sometimes known as the Magnum Opus or Great Work.”[36] It will probably be noted that in Thelema, the specific Magnum Opus/Great Work is concerned with the aligning of the personality with the True Will, and the operation of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel is, for some, merely an aid towards this process - for others, it is the process itself. The particular terminology is taken form *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, but the practice has symbolic possible with the process of

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36 Carrol, *Liber Null and Psychonaut*, pg. 49.

acquiring a Daimon in Ancient Greek magic[37], which was itself seen as a mediator between the human and the divine[38]. The practice is believed to align the practitioner with exclusive sets of knowledge and powers, otherwise thought to be unattainable, and essential for the completion of the great work.

The Crossing of the Abyss is a process whereby the magician enters into a belief where they surrender identity and become consciously separate from the idea of their core identity[39]. The Abyss is described as a region between the duality of manifestation, and the unity of pure, undivided, being. To cross the Abyss is then to arrive at a state of conscious apprehension of the unity of all things and the non-identification with the selves which are created through the proposed dialectics of manifestation. It will have become clear from this description that the idea of a central self is not congruent with all forms of occult practice. There is the common usage of a division of bodies, for instance the Egyptian dissection of the human being into the Ba, the Ka, the Heka and Akh, with various levels of physical density in-between[40]. The Theosophical type division of the body into Physical, Astral, Etheric, and spiritual or even into Sulphur, Salt and Mercury, are also given space. These are presented, however, usually as maps and models to be eventually discarded, and there seems a common edict within Occult practice, but particularly Left Handed occultism, not to 'confuse the map with the territory.'[41]

Another important aspect of Thelemic philosophy, integral to this particular discussion, is the idea of the six Aeons, periods of time characterised by distinct social and cultural processes which characterise history and the future, similar but not identical to the Astrological periods, e.g. The Age of Pisces, and the Age of

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37 See Flowers, *Hermetic Magic*, pg. 182 for a process analogous with the 'Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.
38 Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* pg.163.
39 Nema, *Maat Magick*, pg. 71.
40 Flowers, *Hermetic Magic*, pps. 73-77.
41 Humphries and Vain, *NTWICCM*, pg. 137-138

Aquarius. Specific to our discussion are the Aeons of Horus and the Aeons of Maat. Each Aeon, from the first to the fifth have Egyptian deities attributed to them, except for the sixth, the wordless and silent Aeon of Zain - which is given a letter of the Hebrew Alphabet[42]. It is theorised that The Aeon of Horus was heralded by the dictation of the Book of the Law to Aleister Crowley in 1904[43]. The Aeon of Horus, also referred to as the Aeon of the Crowned and Conquering Child, is characterised by the breaking down of old social orders endemic to the Aeon of Osiris before it, of the freedom and liberation of the human species from, in part, the Judeo-Christian paradigm (hence, perhaps, the popular presentation of Aleister Crowley as a satanist), Matriarchy and Patriarchy. The Aeon of Maat is the Aeon of Truth, Justice and Balance, where it is posited the human species reaches a gestalt consciousness, specifically referred to as a double-consciousness, where the species is unified into one mind, while maintaining a sense of individuality. Central to the latter Aeon is the deity N'aton[44], who is presented as an androgenous being created by the collective consciousness of the human species.

A particular movement within Thelemic magick is concerned with The Aeon of Maat. In 1974, Maggie Ingals was contacted by the being calling itself N'aton[45]. This deity purportedly spoke from the future, dictating another Thelemic 'Holy Book' to Ingalls called Liber Pennae Prenumbra, The Book of The Preshadowing of the Feather[46]. Since that date, Maggie Ingalls and others have been instrumental in spearheading, and perhaps creating, a new movement within Thelemic culture that is concerned with a 'double current', encompassing the particular energies and ideals, the ‘currents' of both the Aeons of Horus and Maat, positing that the Aeons can exist

42 Duquette in *The Magick of Thelema* gives a good round-up of these ideas on pgs.6-16, with discussion of the Aeons of Isis, Osiris and Horus; however, subsequent Thelemites, notably Kenneth Grant and Maat Magickians, have added to these - the Aeons of Bes (the first), Maat and the final Aeon of Zain.
43 Duquette, *The Magick of Thelema*, pg. 19
44 Nema, *Maat Magick*, pg. 224.
45 *Ibid,* pg.91-92.
46 *Ibid.*

besides or within each other if the practitioner wants them to[47]. It is the Double-Current that the Horus-Maat Lodge are particularly concerned with, and that the present author was initiated into in May of 2005.

INITIATION

Presented in this sections a personal account of this author's initiation into the Horus-Maat Lodge. Though I have attempted to adopt an outsider view for the preceding discussions (how successfully probably questionable) I will take off my outsider hat altogether until I deconstruct the event, discussing then the peculiar problems of doing so, and present myself to myself as an ethnographic subject. As mentioned, this approach is modelled upon *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic* by Jenny Blain. The particular issues of an Insider giving an account of their religiosity and interpreting it for outsiders, was something which arguably the Study of Religions, when first constructed as a new discipline apart from Theology, was created to avoid [48]. But often, the only people interested in studying Esoteric traditions are the Esotericists themselves, hence the huge volume of insider material presented as academic work. Perhaps, for the Outsider when gazing into that particular world, there is nothing to see - whereas for the insider, there is a complex latice of material and phenomena that deserves analysis. One could argue though, that for the insider of a religion to present an academic study of that religion, the problem is the same for the sociologist looking generally at 'society'- at no point is the sociologist apart from society, they are always an insider, but have been equipped especially with a toolbox of methodologies with which they can study what they are always a part of, and they have created a whole discipline through what could be interpreted as insider

47 See Kenneth Grant’s introduction to Nema’s *Maat Magick*, pgs. x-xi.
48 See Ninian Smart’s foreward to *Approaches to The Study of Religions*, pps. ix-x.

discourse.

In a study of the nature of etic and emic perspectives, Kenneth L. Pike makes the following points pertinent to this discussion: “In the total analysis [of a system], the initial etic description gradually is refined, and is ultimately - in principle, but probably never in practice - replaced by one which is totally emic.”[49] Applied to Study of Religions, this implies that the insider is able to view the whole system of a religion, relating it to their own knowledge, and being able to create therefrom a holistic view. Perhaps then, because of the complexities induced in contemporary spiritualites, an insider/emic perspective is a more efficient tool - where for the outsider, the systems seem overly complex and impenetrable. From my own perspective, the greatest challenge presented to the insider seems to be the usage of language. In this study, I have made certain careful assumptions. One of which, central to my whole methodology, is that my own occult practice serves as a functional reference point to describe the wider field of other peoples occult practice, through the perpetual reference to my own experience of other practitioner’s experience, and the books they write - the parts of our, or perhaps theirs and my, practices which I either learn from or am able to in some way identify with, either in part or whole. In this regard, I have been careful where necessary not to use ontological absolutes, such as ‘is’ or ‘always’ or ‘all‘. Nothing particularly qualifies me for this, but as an insider, I perhaps naturally feel as if I should be able to give a fair description of my own spirituality, while making reference, where remembered and noted that it is probably needed, to the academic discipline of Study of Religions which I have been introduced to and sometimes immersed in for the past three years. I have been a practising occultist for longer, though, perhaps causing a natural imbalance, no matter how careful, between the type of descriptions I’ve given. It should perhaps be noted here that I have attempted not to regard the particular academic viewpoint presented as an outsider

49 Kenneth L. Pike, “Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behaviour” , pg. 30.

viewpoint, splitting myself in two between Outsider/Academic and Insider/Practitioner. I've tried to maintain an equal balance of both where appropriate. As mentioned above, there is the contention that after successive periods of immersion studying a system, the outsider eventually becomes an insider - the reverse is true in my particular case.

It is hoped that this account will add another lens to the accumulating fractal meta-narrative of contemporary spiritualites. Which is to say, the wide variety of contemporary spiritualites, and their academic studies, remain stories even in their academic context - the post-modern assertion that all narratives are dead (ref.) is a narrative within itself, and implodes as a concept on a close reading. The response to this must be how we choose to read each story, how we classify it and decode, and perhaps sometimes re-code, it's meaning. An accumulative story, made up of the individual viewpoints of various insiders of various communities, is perhaps the best way for a clear picture of contemporary spiritualities to be observed, because as has been discussed, the personal nature of these religiosities depends upon the participation of the individual in particular rather than the community at large, because of the sometimes wide variations that can occur in theory and practice from one insider to another. Here follows then, a short account of what being a magician is and what it means to the practitioner as an expression of personal religiosity, leading into an account of initiation into the Horus-Maat Lodge.

INITIATION

> Occultism has been a personal spiritual adventure. The yearning for community has been consistent since discovering the occultism's presence in

cyber-space, when I was 19 or 20. There was a need for being taught, for being shown things, rather than fumble around in the dark by yourself. There is also the need for reinforcement. Part of the process of becoming a ritual magician is overcoming the peculiar embarrassment of making strange sounds and gestures in a circle at apparently imaginable deities. Though I'd been involved in a self-initiatory path, I hadn't given up on the idea of being initiated into something by somebody else. As an occultist, there is the pervasive feeling of being an Outisder, that has been present with myself long before the beginnings of Occult practice. I'd always found it fascinating that other occultists corroborated this experience - the drive 'to belong' is often an overpowering one, and perhaps a standard motivation for being initiated into a particular community.

I've maintained a belief in the importance of both kinds of initiation. Symbolic initiation, where a particular ceremony or ritual is performed in order to introduce the practitioner to either a group or a certain set of ideas - a new belief system, or a magickal current. But the most important process, as any magician would probably agree, is self-initiation, and the particular (and peculiar) ordeals that a magician might find themselves going through, learning curves whose meaning is heightened and intensified due to the particular codes and behaviours the magician adopts in response to the universe. Oaths are very often important parts of this process.

My initiation into the Horus-Maat lodge was not suggested by me. I had been working with the double current of Horus-Maat for a couple of years, having been working with Thelema for just about the same amount of time. Sexual mysteries and kundalini yoga had become of paramount importance in my own spiritual path, and the strange process of Christian de-conditioning had been gradually occurring, becoming separate from the religion I was raised with and inverting the parts of myself determined by the Christian paradigm. For me, this is part of what the Aeon of Horus is all about, and the conjoined energies of the Aeon of Maat, in my own practice, serves to balance

out the destructive/constructive 'force and fire' of Horus, quickening and stabilising the process of change from one paradigm to another.

In late April 2005 I played host to the Magus/Fool 2/3 degree in the Order ov Chaos, which I had initiated myself into around a year earlier, synchronised with other initiations occurring around the globe. We were participating in the Omphalos Magickal Art Fair in Bath. Orryelle has been involved with the Horus-Maat lodge for some time. Along with hir skills as a performer, painter, poet writer and sorcerer Orryelle is also a tattooist. I had earmarked hir for my first tattoo some time ago, seeing the inscription of my flesh as a good symbolic gesture of dedication to the double-current of Horus-Maat. Orryelle asked if, prior to the tattoo while we were in Glastonbury together, I would like to be initiated into the Horus-Maat lodge. I agreed, thinking that was probably a good idea. Glastonbury Tor had played host to another couple of initiations into the lodge in 2003, and also the 13th Tribe weaving, a ritual Orryelle manifested (under the guidance of the Secret Chiefs, of course) to earth the double current of Horus-Maat into the planetary Heart-Chakra, and help bring about the global changes necessary for a clean shift into a new era, or a new world order, come December 2012. I'd never undergone a physical one on one initiation before, and I welcomed the opportunity for the experience, along with my gradual emergence into association with other occultists and ritual magickians around the globe, begun with initiation into the Order ov Chaos, and continued somewhat by Orryelle and I initiating a couple into that order the week before - I had become initiator, which was symbolically important, so I thought it was only right that I balanced that out, with the scales of Maat, by becoming the initiated.

We made our way up the Tor, after scouting out areas for the possible performance of a ritual theatre piece Orryelle devised around Parcival for the coming June, spending a little time siting on a rock we later found out was called the seat perilous. There were some people around the top, playing

flutes, and others walking up and down. Orryelle asked me if I wanted to wait till they were clear, but I wanted to press on with it. We selected the spot where the 13th Tribe Weaving had been performed almost two years before, I was asked to be seated and proceed with alternate nostril breathing, a pranayama technique that aids the mind to go into trance, balancing out the brain hemispheres and encouraging them to conjoin, as opposed to switch between the dominance of one and the other. I sat in the dragon set posture, to keep my spine straight and my muladhara chakra close to the earth, in order to allow the fire-serpent kundalini a clean flow up and down my spine and into the earth should she wish to uncoil and reach for the stars. It was dusk, and with the sun lowering itself into deeper and deeper red on the horizon, I closed my eyes while Orryelle opened the circle with the six-fold banishing ritual of Maatian Magick, to simultaneously clear the initiatory space, consecrate it, and have the six deities Bes, Osiris, Isis, Maat, Horus and Harporcrat present to watch the right.

With eyes closed in the dragon posture, Orryelle circled me, alternately clockwise and anit-clockwise, intoning the sacred names of the Deiites who preside within the Double-Current, and names I didn;t recognise, which I later discovered were the names of the guardians of the tunnelss of set, the nightside paths of the tree of life, for as the Aeon of Maat is the Aeon of Truth, Justice and Balance, I must be initiated into the Dayside of the Universe as well as the Nightside, the Light and the Shadow, the positivces and negatives. The rite culminated with the massaging of my crown chakra while intoning the sacred name N'aton, consecrating my consciousness into the future-as-now-emerging double consciousness of the human race. And my eyes were opened. I was a member of the Horus-Maat lodge, different than I was when I'd sat down before the rite began, with a new feeling of expansiveness, of openness to the universe. I got up, gave Orryelle a hug, and we eventually made our way down the Tor to get a curry.

ANALYSIS

Of immediate interest to the ethnographer of contemporary spiritualites is perhaps the location of Glastonbury as choice for the rite described above. Glastonbury has been observed as a particular site for a spectrum of different practitioners, from Neo-pagan traditions, New Age spiritualites, Celtic Christianity and even more standard forms of Christian religiosity [50]. That the magicians in question should regard this site as important, perhaps links in this particular manifestation of occult practice and belief with New Age spiritualites. Likewise, the idea of N'aton, a deity speaking from the future into the past is a distinctly new age concept, as is the idea of an Aeon of Truth, Justice and Balance - a harmonious time for the evolving consciousness of the human species perhaps analogous, as is the Aeon of Horus, with the ideas of an Aquarian age. Noted also is the mention of 2012 as a date of significance. This date is derived from certain considerations of Mayan calendrics, and is the end of the Mayan calendar, signifying to some the possible end of the world, or at least a shift in human consciousness. More particular readings of this date involve a belief in the shifting of the polarities of the Earth. The double current of Horus-Maat is particularly concerned with the harmonising of polarities into a third principle composed of both, glyphed through the emergence of the deity Hrumachis, a name mentioned in the rite above, who is an androgynous figure, the uniting of the male and the female. The ritual itself appears simple to the initiated, though able to perceive the various layers of its symbolism. What is occurring in the mind and body of the initiator, Orryelle, is

50 Bowman, "More of the same? Christianity, Vernacular Religion and Alternative Apirituality in Glastonbury", pps.83-85, and York, "Alternative Spirituality in Europe: Amsterdam, Aups and Bath", pg. 118..

obscured through the absence of his own account of the rite.

To return to the particular articles first mentioned in the paragraph above, mention was made in an earlier part of this paper that New Age and Paganism are studied perhaps to the exclusion of Occultism in its own right as a contemporary spirituality, but as can be observed from the above account, a reading that partakes of the particular definitions of what constitutes New Age, and what constitutes Paganism, can emerge at some fruitful sense of what is occurring in the account. A specific pantheon of deities, a belief in a future time of harmony (even if that future time is being consciously manifested in the present), chanting sacred names and the awareness of Chakras, ‘earthing energies’ and Kundalini, have all been observed as making up what constitutes in some researchers parlance a New Age spirituality. The particular aversion that ritual magicians have at considering themselves as New Age is perhaps a moot point if a proper application of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion is to be used. Regardless of what insiders regard themselves as, academics should perhaps feel free and unobligated in their own interpretation and analysis of what they see to be occurring in a particular religiosity. Though it has been demonstrated that the New Age movement is a particular outgrowth of development in the Western Esoteric Tradition, possibly combined, as demonstrated by Michael York, with the development of New Thought in the later half of the 19th Century, it may be that these different spiritualites and currents of thought and practice now feed off each other and cross-pollinate. Another characteristic which may have been observed is the tendency for the occultist to 'pick and mix' different beliefs and practices, aligning it with the trend for syncretism in the New Age. The word inclusivism, however, may be more appropriate in some cases. The idea of syncretistic 'pick-and-mix' spirituality implies the acquisition of codes and symbols with no apparent substance, for the sake, perhaps, of style.

Within the sphere of the practitioner of ritual magick, they are their own priest and teacher in some ways. The Philosophers of Nature, a particular teaching and research organisation of magicians and occultists firmly aligned with Alchemical traditions and the magic of the Golden Dawn, have the following in one of their documents, warning the ritual magician against just this kind of behaviour; within it can also be observed the mention of some specific practices:

> Concentration is one of the key fundamentals to success, visualisation and meditation are the other two. But concentration is not just a mental faculty, it is also an attitude, an approach to ones inner life. If we spend all our time looking for the 'right system' or combination of techniques that will give us the experience we are seeking then more often then not we defeat ourselves. Pick a system and set of daily practices and stick to them! Good solid basics give more results than the most complex of magical endeavours. Accumulating initiations and techniques from diverse sources takes us away from what really matters - the initiation into our Heart, and conversation with our Inner Master. It is better to chant 'OM' everyday for the rest of your life and nothing else than to technically know a half dozen systems of magic and end up with nothing but psychic indigestion. Keep it simple and direct, like the flight of an arrow, and then you will hit your mark.

Whether the ritual magician actually follows this kind of advice is perhaps best addressed with every specific case under analysis, but the various similarities now apparent between Occultism and the wider band of New Age practices has been observed and noted.

However, it is also possible to view within the above account elements which are in line with modern findings of Neo-pagan movements. Though there is a consideration of a future utopian time, the Aeon of Maat, and a paradigm involving a future, and

functionally better, consciousness that the human mind can reach, there is also the concern of manifesting that time in the here and now, acknowledging the cyclic nature of everything with the concept of the Aeons, and the existence of all as here within the moment. But the practitioner also seems concerned with altering his consciousness, implicitly implying that there is something 'wrong' with it, that it needs refined and that truth is only reached through a certain set of behaviours and efforts on the part of the practitioner - this aligns it with a division into a Gnostic world-view. The gnostic world-view being concerned with the idea that consciousness and the world as it is, is somehow at fault, and needs to be improved or changed in accordance with another set of beliefs and behaviours which the gnostic then must adopt in order to change and improve the world and consciousness, the acquisition of correct knowledge and a new way of perceiving things the world. The spirituality of the magician, and perhaps then the wider band of occult practice and belief, seems concerned with this specifically teleological process on some level, as designated by the definition used in the beginning of this paper - positioning occultism as a personal teleological matrix of practice and belief - encouraging a the creation of the term Neo-Gnosticism to describe these particular practices and world-views.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing has been an attempt to present Left-Hand Path Occultism as a particular article of religiosity in contemporary spiritualities. Towards this end, occultism itself has been described as a personal teleological matrix of belief and practice. The particular practices considered Thelemic within the Left-Hand Path occult community, and then more specifically Maatian, have also been laid bare and compartmentalised, perhaps not exhaustively, while indicating the places where this or that practice or belief is specific to Maatian magick, Thelemic Magick, the Left-Hand path as a whole, and the wider band of Occultism; stretching sometimes further

out and then fixing Occultism in its context as a particular manifestation of what is called the Western Esoteric Tradition.

Reference has been made throughout, particularly to Neo-Paganism, but towards the end even New Age, in order to fix the study in contrast and comparison with the accepted discourses about those particular spiritualites. A particular case was observed with occult spiritualities, that their study is often included within the broader definitions of these categories, particularly Neo-paganism. However, it could be argued, Neo-paganism itself having emerged from the Hermetic tradition promulgated by 19th Century occulture, that regarding the particular practices of Ritual Magick and Thelema as Neo-paganism, could be akin to regarding Judaism as an aspect of Christianity. Because the one grew out of the other, it is perhaps more fruitful to regard them as separate. The Occult Tradition, as has been shown, is something that has grown from Ancient Greece, through the middle ages and into the Renaissance, the particular tradition always informing what comes after. This is perhaps to say that Occultism is an undercurrent of theory and practice that has always been the concern of a particular segment of society in the West, alongside the more dominant forms of religious belief and practice. Sometimes Jewish, sometimes Christian, and sometimes Pagan, occultism's particular usage of available cultural symbols and discourses is one of its characteristics, perhaps requiring that it be viewed differently from other religiosities, in that its outward appearance changes, but its central concerns remain the same. These concerns have been shown to be the transmutation of the individual and the world, through the application of certain techniques, in the modern era these being selected personally rather than prescribed by authority - again, aligning occultism with the characteristics of the religiosity of the particular time. As has been mentioned, the religiosity of the modern era seems characterised by syncretism and inclusivism, where the individual creates and maintains their own personal relationship with the sacred. Perhaps then, if occultism

always adapts to the reigning form of religiosity, this is why it appears to have similar characteristics to the Neo-pagan and New Age categories of spirituality. But, as has also been demonstrated, Occultism has always been a 'pick-and-mix' form of religiosity, so it is perhaps then Occultism that has informed this particular form of religiosity in the modern era, from its emergence as a public discourse in the Victorian era onwards.

These are bold claims and statements, and perhaps the kind expected from an insider when discussing their particular religiosity. But occultism, as has perhaps been demonstrated, is a peculiar set of beliefs and practices, mystical in its attempt to align the practitioner with a perceived Ultimate Reality [51], and nebulous in its form, as it can partake of various different mystical doctrines, such as Kabbalah, Sufism or Tibetan Buddhism, in the practitioners attempt to create their personal teleological matrix that provides meaning and, perhaps, progress, towards this apprehension of Ultimate Reality.

Reference was made above to the idea of a fractal meta-narrative that described contemporary spiritualities: an encompassing description composed of smaller descriptions, which themselves may be composed of smaller descriptions, towards a clear view of the differing manifestations of spiritual practice and belief, presenting at once in clear view their differences and similarities. A description which is always referring to itself, and always accumulating. Arguably this is already occurring within the study of contemporary spiritualities, and perhaps it is here that insider discourses, presented academically, fit in. It is hoped that the foregoing has been a contribution to this accumulating description, presenting the manifestation of a personal religiosity, and placing it in its wider context as a part of an ongoing tradition, while clarifying the nature of that tradition, and presenting an effective description of it.

51 Hughes, "Mysticism: The Perennial Philosophy", pg. 306.

Towards this end, it has perhaps been observed that there is a sphere of spiritual practice and belief that may be described as Neo-gnostic - new because it is born within the current life of the practitioner and is perhaps specific to their own world-view, and gnostic because it is concerned with the refinement of consciousness towards an apprehension and experience of something which could be described as Ultimate Reality.

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